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SUBJECT: BELGIUM SET TO ABSTAIN ON GOLDSTONE REPORT

REF: BRUSSELS 1487

Classified By: A/DCM AMB LANGE SCHERMERHORN

¶1. (C) The Chief of Staff to Belgium's Foreign Minister, Franciskus Van Daele, told the Ambassador and POL/ECON Counselor November 4 that there was no European consensus on the UNGA resolution on the Goldstone report. Van Daele said that there was still on-going coordination between the 27 EU members.

¶2. (C) Van Daele said Belgium's position had been developed before Israel had begun its lobbying against the resolution. Shimon Perez had called Belgian Foreign Minister Yves Leterme to lobby the Belgians. Van Daele stressed that, as an incoming EU President (in the latter half of 2010), Belgium needed to be seen as taking the middle ground on the issue. Van Daele said that Perez had sent Leterme a letter thanking Belgium for its willingness to abstain on the vote.

¶3. (C) Van Daele said there were strong domestic political pressures in Belgium against a no vote. These pressures came from the parliament, the governing coalition and even within Van Daele's Christian Democratic party itself. Then the Ambassador asserted that Belgium should vote on the basis of the problems with the report itself, not on what other countries would do. Van Daele replied that an EU President should try to hold the middle ground on sensitive issues and repeated that strong domestic political pressures came into play, drawing from strong feelings of support for the Palestinians. Nevertheless, Belgium did not want the report to be politicized and did not support having the report sent to the UNGA instead of to the Human Rights Council.

¶4. (C) Van Daele concluded that an abstention was as far as he could push the issue. He wants to preserve the credibility Belgium has with Israel, yet also to deflect domestic political charges that Prime Minister Van Rompuy; Leterme and he are too "pro-Israeli." Van Daele then stressed that there were three international issues that always brought significant domestic political pressure in Belgium: Congo, the Middle East and climate change. Despite these political constraints, Van Daele puts high store in its relations with the U.S. Van Daele said he wants to bring U.S.-Belgian relations back on track after a difficult decade.

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